

Goodland alumnus earns hall of fame spot

By Kevin Bottrell
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Believe it or not, but Ben Duell, who is receiving the National Wrestling Hall of Fame's "Lifetime Service to Wrestling" award, never wrestled until his senior year at Goodland High School.

"I got into a scuffle on the back side of the high school," he said. "I whipped up on one of the boys who went out for wrestling, so the other guys got me to try out."

He got third place at the state competition that year and was recruited by Kansas State University.

"My spirit kind-of exploded in all kinds of strange moves," he said. "That's how I won, they didn't know what to do with me."

Duell was nominated by the Colorado Chapter of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum. There will be an Honors Banquet for inductees in May and Duell will have a spot in the Hall of Fame in Stillwater, Okla.

Duell earned his recognition through his years of coaching the high school wrestling team in Burlington. After college, he worked as a vocational agriculture teacher in Overbrook and a sixth grade teacher in Junction City before moving back to northwest Kansas. He settled in Ruleton in 1960 and went to work teaching sixth grade in Burlington.

He didn't start out there a coaching position. Duell said he was bored on his lunch hour so he decided to

teach some wrestling moved to the fifth and sixth graders.

"I discovered they learned quickly," he said, "because they didn't have any bad habits."

Because of eligibility rules in those days, he said, fifth and sixth graders could compete on the junior high school team. That year, his fifth and sixth graders made up the first six weight classes on the junior high team.

While teaching at Burlington, the school's football and wrestling coach was dismissed and Duell was tapped as his replacement. At the time, Burlington was a big basketball town, he said, but Wray was the best at wrestling.

"My goal was to put together a team that could beat Wray," he said.

Duell's team was able to beat Wray as well as getting state championships in 1973 and 1974. His team had four individual state champions those years.

"It all developed by accident," he said. "I never had a game plan. I just kept working at it a day at a time, a month at a time."

Burlington's success in the 1970s helped wrestling become a major sport in the area.

Duell also served as the physical education coach, where he said he also taught the girls how to wrestle. This got them interested in the sport so more would come to cheer on the boys team.

Duell was offered a spot on a new Saturday morning radio show, after all the other coaches had turned it down. He said he discovered that gave him a lot of influence and soon he had players, other coaches and parents listening in.

"I got to coach the whole community over the radio," he said.

Duell resigned from the Burlington School District in 1977 to fulfill his lifelong dream of building a farming operation. While he retired from education, he said he doesn't believe in full retirement.

"I will farm until they drag me off," he said.

He served on the Goodland school board eight years and stuck with radio broadcasting until two years ago.

Duell and his first wife had 15 children. She died seven years ago, but he remarried a woman from Oberlin who had four adult children. Duell has 52 grandchildren.

There are a lot of similarities between raising a family and coaching a team, he said. Duell started his kids in wrestling when they were young.

"Mostly because they were driving their mother insane," he said.

His sons, Fred and Doug, wrestled at Oklahoma State University. Doug started coaching in Burlington in 1983.

Duell said he plans to attend the Honors Banquet for Hall of Fame inductees in May.

Focused on the throw



Goodland High School senior Hope Cochran threw the ball to third base during practice last week. The Cowgirls softball team played its first game Thursday at Hays. The girls' next game will be after Spring Break at 3 p.m. Friday, March 30, at home against Scott City.

Photo by Kevin Bottrell/The Goodland Star-News

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Wednesday: Gold day
4 p.m.: Central Site Council

Thursday: Black day
Earliest competition date for Spring Sports
3 p.m.: Varsity Softball at Hays
4 p.m.: Parent/Teacher Conferences

Friday: NO SCHOOL
8 a.m.: Parent/Teacher Conferences
3 p.m.: Varsity Baseball at Burlington

Monday and Tuesday:
NO SCHOOL-SPRING BREAK

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